

# The politics of sexual representation

by Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage

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Introduction to special section on sexual representation

## Opening a forum

— Chuck Kleinhans

Within JUMP CUT, we've faced problems trying to develop a discussion of pornography and other sexual images. While we have a long history of publishing feminist criticism, and have published pioneering work on women and violence (JC 14), gay men and film (JC 16), lesbians and film (JC 24/25), and women and representation (JC 29), there has been no consensus among the editorial board about issues of sexual representation. A few issues back (JC 26) we published several pieces on women and pornography: an introduction to the issues by Julia Lesage, Valerie Miner on the pornography industry, an analysis by Lesage of the classic D.W. Griffith film, *BROKEN BLOSSOMS*, and an annotated bibliography by Gina Marchetti. We hoped that that section would initiate further discussion, and we anticipate that the material in this and the following issue about representing sexuality, pornography, and sexist images will continue and expand the discussion.

At the same time, we're acutely aware of problems at this point in trying to discuss sexual representation. Recently, the feminist movement has divided sharply on questions of sexuality. In particular, a strongly dissenting mixture of women defend their "politically incorrect" sexuality (such as swinging, casual sex, and lesbian sadomasochism) against what they see as a puritanical "good girl" mentality in the feminist anti-pornography movement. The anti-porn movement itself has decisively altered direction in the past two years.

From an emphasis on education and traditional pressure group tactics, it has turned to pushing for local censorship ordinances, most notably in

Minneapolis where such a law was co-authored by feminist lawyer and scholar Catherine MacKinnon, best known for her pioneering work on on-the-job sexual harassment of women, and Andrea Dworkin, outspoken lecturer, speaker and author of *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. Although their model ordinance did not pass, a similar law passed in Indianapolis and was challenged immediately by the American Civil Liberties Union. Anti-porn forces have geared up for a strategy of passing censorship legislation in likely communities. Feminists have not been unified in supporting this strategy. Many see it as diverting political energy away from more pressing issues which women must confront in the Reagan era. Others have pointed out that police and prosecutors can and probably will use censorship laws against gays, feminists and other progressive people, and particularly against feminist and gay bookstores, film and video screenings, and publications.

The debate around these issues has been explosive and antagonistic. Yet we think it is important to present and discuss the range of issues in JUMP CUT. Understanding sexual representation is necessary for more general critiques of advertising, television, and Hollywood film. And exploring new forms of sexual image-making is often a major focus of alternative media practices in avant-garde art and feminist and gay media work. For cultural workers in particular, these issues remain a pressing concern in our ongoing work.

As difficult as it may be to carry on a productive dialogue around these concerns, we think it essential to try. At times we've had difficulty putting together this section. One point of contention among the staff deserves specific mention. In considering the photos which accompany Tom Waugh's article on gay vs. straight pornography, some controversy surfaced within the editorial board. The mere presentation of erect penises offends some of our editors-not because of prudishness, but because the penis-as-sign inevitably signifies male sexual power, and this power carries a threat to many women. The power relations behind such an image are an integral part of U.S. culture today, and feminist anger at images that connote male sexual power cannot be ignored or put aside. Our decision to print the pictures includes an understanding of the potential shock they carry for some readers. At the same time, precisely because the photos demonstrated points in the article, which describes a frequently hidden, ignored, or unknown minority sexual culture, we thought they were appropriate and helpful for understanding Waugh's arguments.

But the decision to print the photos does not resolve the tension. Such difficult contradictions pervade considerations of pornography at this point in time. Discussions around these issues are often explosive, with the participants struggling around definitions and first principles, when they get beyond the frequent phenomenon of simply not accurately

hearing what the other person is saying. Yet for media workers, the topic is a crucial one, and we hope to establish a forum in JUMP CUT where the complexity of these issues can be explored productively.

Thus we decided to bring together in this issue several articles by gay media activists because they present an analysis of gay male sexual images that have not been previously presented outside of the gay press. Richard Dyer examines the romantic narrative structure of gay male features. Tom Waugh develops an extensive comparison of gay male and heterosexual male commercial porn films and discusses Curt McDowell's documentary of his fantasies in LOADS. John Greyson looks at gay personal video as self-expression and exploration. As these analyses demonstrate, many assumptions about pornography in the current discussion reflect a limited view based on visual material directed at heterosexual men. By broadening the terrain of investigation, unexamined assumptions about male and female, straight and gay representations are open to examination.

Continuing the discussion, Lisa DiCaprio considers NOT A LOVE STORY's historical impact on today's pornography controversy, and she contrasts the film's use of stripper Linda Lee Tracy with CHICKEN RANCH's presentation of Nevada prostitutes.

In our next issue we will be running articles which extend the dialogue. German feminist Gertrud Koch will analyze the history of film pornography and its relation to the male unconscious. Continuing our long-standing interest in Jean-Luc Godard, critic James Roy MacBean will deal with EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF. An interview with several porn stars will discuss women in the industry. And several articles will analyze films which show women taking an active stance against sexual assault: Marco Starr Boyjian looks at I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE. Patricia Erens examines THE SEDUCTION. John Jakitis treats Gaylon Emerzian's independent film GIVING WAY, and Gina Marchetti analyzes the Philippine martial arts action film FIRECRACKER. Tom Waugh's bibliography on pornography will update and expand one we ran in JC 26. Additional articles are in various stages of writing and editing and will also be forthcoming.

In editing this and future material on sexual representation, we have as a goal that our editors, writers and readers consider the range of issues and the different political analyses and sensibilities involved while advancing the discussion. We hope other writers and our readers will contribute to the dialogue, and we encourage new articles and letters in response.

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**The politics of sexual representation**  
— Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage

Over the past five years, issues of sexual representation, particularly around commercial pornography, have raised major questions for media workers and feminists. Why these matters have now become crucial must be seen in the development of feminism itself. The resurgence of feminism in the late 60s occurred within a larger movement for change that also had dealt with personal and sexual concerns. Yet, only as the autonomous women's movement confronted a series of organizing issues and its own theoretical evolution was it able to clarify its analysis of sexual oppression. In the U.S. and Europe, women collectively faced, analyzed and debated issues of abortion and reproductive rights, rape, incest, battering, workplace harassment, appearance and dress. Consequently, women developed organizing strategies and tactics to deal with problems in these areas. A kind of clearing and separating of issues relating to sexuality and sexual oppression occurred. This was a necessary precondition to the later clarification of issues around sexual practices and the emergence of an active movement within feminism combating pornography.

Feminist writers have offered an extensive critique of pornography and of the visual representation of women in mass culture, ranging from music videos to TV commercials. Politically, such a critique rests on many (even most) women's recognition that commercial pornography stands as a visual index of women's oppression in contemporary society. It marks as a visual sign, the existence of a rape culture — that is, a situation in which most women and girls fear the frequent possibility of sexual assault and shape their behavior in relation to that danger.

Many women reject pornography for its social presence. Porn bookstores, magazine racks, and theaters stand as a visual expression of male dominance of public space. Men's access to sexually explicit material for arousal indicates a social structure that limits and oppresses women. Commercial pornography is men's turf. It not only obsessively repeats male sexual fantasies, often misogynist, it also reinforces more generalized male heterosexual privilege to express and define sexuality. Men have the right to express sexuality publicly, and this is a major way that women are constrained, harassed and put down. Sexual power-plays in the social sphere range from the boss' putting his hand on the secretary's hip to the factory owner's demanding sex from undocumented women workers to the police's raping prostitutes.

On a more subtle level, but on the same continuum, men's stares, comments, and making women react on the street are everyday actions by which men emotionally "prove" their right to move through public space in a way that women cannot. Women and girls, especially adolescents, regularly have to deal with men's aggressive looks and words on the street. Because of these street hassles, mothers of girls often become particularly enraged at pornography as a visible marker of misogynist, threatening sexuality.

Because of this identification of commercial pornography with male social and sexual privilege, many women also reject gay male pornography, sold on the same magazine racks as heterosexual porn in many cases, or seen in movie theaters in urban gay ghettos just like heterosexual porn films. Gay men have male privilege in public space, especially when they hide their homosexuality. But the open expression of gay male sexuality is narrowly limited. It occurs on the street only in ghettos in anonymous urban areas. Even there, openly gay men are subject to gay bashing and are not protected (in fact, they are often harassed) by the law. Gay men do not bear direct responsibility for women's street hassles. But gay men do have social privilege and access to the streets, especially at night, which women do not have. For broad social reasons, gay pornography's development and its importance to many gay men has no parallel in the women's movement.

This lack of a women's pornography has much to do with the relation between social sexual organization, and in particular with women's limited access to expressing their sexuality openly. The whole social discourse around sexuality functions to constrain women in the public sphere.

The feminist critique of pornography has decisively changed the commonplace left-liberal assumption that the struggle against the puritan legacy of U.S. life was inherently and automatically progressive and has remained so. While sexual conservatism and censorship have been oppressive within North American culture, the liberal sexual freedom argument has also frequently silenced women and trivialized their fear and rage at rape culture because such an argument ridicules and dismisses many women's gut reaction to pornography.

The analytic background of the feminist anti-pornography position develops in a series of books. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) presents a major re-evaluation of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer by examining the specifically male, and often misogynist, nature of their literary fantasies. She also analyzes how Freud's ideas were used socially to buttress sexist assumptions about the nature of men and women. Millett's book, which remains a classic discussion of sexism in fictional narrative, gave the women's movement a powerful argument against the prevailing artistic and intellectual celebration of male sexual fantasy as inherently liberating. Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) added to the evolving discussion by dealing with sexual assault as social fact and as "mass psychology." By stressing the universality of rape and how cultures reinforce it, Brownmiller provided an intellectual basis for the then-emergent feminist, rape prevention and intervention movement.

Kathleen Barry's *Female Sexual Slavery* (1979) documented women's victimization by force and threat. She drew connections between

kidnapping, rape, forced prostitution, incest, coercion, and wife battering, and included a chapter on "Pornography: The Ideology of Cultural Sadism." The first national feminist conference on pornography was held in 1979 and brought attention to the issue and to the efforts of several local groups who had been organizing against abusive images of women in advertising, rock record album jackets, and commercial films. Summing up the practical experience of such organizing and the theoretical discussion of feminist thinkers, Laura Lederer's anthology, *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography* (1980), gave a broad introduction to the feminist anti-pornography position, which was elaborated in turn by Susan Griffin's *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (1981) and Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981). Various slide shows of sexist images of women provided the major educational tool of the anti-pornography movement until the timely arrival of Bonnie Klein's documentary film, NOT A LOVE STORY, which had extensive runs in many cities and which serves as a standard classroom and organizing tool. In the past two years, the women in the movement have increasingly turned their efforts to pass local censorship laws against porno theaters and bookstores.

As extensive and well-publicized as the feminist anti-pornography position is, it has faced significant criticism from within the broader feminist movement. This criticism usually also acknowledges the misogynist intent of most sexual representation in our culture, particularly in images combining sexuality and violence. But it takes issue with the anti-porn position, particularly in the understanding of sexuality itself.

In the past decade and a half, feminism has developed a very full and elaborate analysis of sexual oppression — of how the social construction of gender and sexuality systematically exploits women. At the same time, feminism has not developed a theory of sexuality. In the absence of a satisfactory understanding of human sexuality, current strategies and tactics around oppressive sexual representations remain inadequate to face the problems they are trying to confront. This is obvious when these strategies simply invoke a norm of "politically correct" sexuality.

Such a concept of sexuality seems based on the preferences and behaviors of those invoking the standard. It fails to acknowledge diversity among women, among feminists of long standing, in terms of sexual practices and experiences. Frequently, feminists have found it explosive merely to articulate these differences, as when the New York Women Against Pornography organized a protest against an academic conference on women and sexuality at Barnard College and effectively halted the publication of a pre-conference diary of the planning for and philosophy of the event.

The general feminist anti-pornography critique must face a number of significant objections. Scientifically, it depends on a simplistic behavioral psychology to explain pornography's effects. It assumes that exposure to pornography has an undifferentiated, calculable effect on men, which has a direct result in both the man's consciousness and observable behavior. Behavioral psychology laboratory experiments, such as those of Edward Donnerstein, are brought forward in an opportunistic way to "prove" that the pornographic stimulus produces a bad response. People advancing this position seem to forget that a decade ago the women's movement unified in rejecting behavioral psychology in favor of a more humane and humanistic psychology and in attacking the close links of behavioral psychology to social engineering.

Behavioral psychology, after all, stands as the theoretical justification for behavior modification — i.e., psychic and physical assault, in prisons and mental hospitals. In particular, behavior modification techniques such as shock therapy have had a long history of use against racial minorities, lesbians and gays, and problem adolescents. Behaviorist psychology rests on fundamental assumptions about personality, behavior, learning, and culture, about how things happen and how change takes place. It also has historical links to the forced ordering of individuals to the status quo. In these regards, it is absolutely antithetical to the principles of feminism. Such a model of human consciousness and behavior cannot be selectively taken over in a progressive way, however convenient an alliance might seem in the short run. It negates the social and individual complexities that shape human response.

Second, critiques of visual pornography too often rest on a naive and misleading understanding of the photographic/ electronic image. Too often the critique of sexual imagery assumes that such images simply and directly reproduce reality. Yet the major theoretical and practical development of image analysis in the past two decades has undermined the notion that an unmediated reality can be simply duplicated by image technology. Rather, realism itself is highly conventional, as are the ways that people understand images; i.e., such an understanding is highly socially constructed. Certainly images utilize imitation. But the nature of reproduction, media of reproduction, is such that reality — the tangible and social world as it exists — comes to us only via the media, which have a primary artificial and thus cultural nature. That's what's implied in the very word "image." We will find no simple "negative image" of women, nor any simple and universal "positive" one. Images are always understood in context and through the filter of the receiver's consciousness.

In this regard, it is revealing to consider that the feminist authority figures in NOT A LOVE STORY are all writers, well-established in verbal



and print culture. Feminist anti-pornography writings lack spokespeople familiar with feminist work in the visual and performance arts. And despite the movement's fundamental insistence on "a clear and present difference" between erotica and pornography, it has never been able to put forth a substantial exhibition of art, film or video to support this claim.

Related to this problem of not grasping the nature of image material, the anti-porn stance often assumes that there is an immanent meaning in the object being studied. Implied is that pornographic images themselves contain specific and universal meanings. However, image research and theory has shown that "meaning" does not reside *in* the object. It is formed in a relation between the object and a subject-observer. Meaning is a constructed relation. It depends on the context as well as on the subject's precise history and consciousness. No unitary or singular meaning adheres to any image object but rather a range of possible constructed meanings, which come into actual being only through experimental acts. This is not to say that meaning is entirely relative and idiosyncratic, for the makers of images, the images themselves, and the subjects who receive them always exist in history, in society, and their shared conventions are open to social and cultural analysis. But theorists of the mass media would argue against simplistic assumptions about meaning simply existing in the object as well as against simplistic assumptions about what meaning the subject receives or constructs. (For an extended discussion of these issues as developed in feminist film analysis, see the section on "Women and Representation" in JUMP CUT 29, particularly Chris Straayer's discussion of differential responses by lesbian-feminists to PERSONAL BEST.)

Most crucially, in the debates around pornography, distinctions are often made between a good and acceptable "erotica" and an evil and pernicious "pornography," yet such distinctions rest on the assumption that an image would have an inherent meaning. On closer inspection, this too is "interpretation," and it rests on a culturally and subjectively developed sense of good taste and aesthetic or moral education. Projections about distinctions between erotica and pornography are often put forth with no awareness at all of the ethnocentric, class, and race bias that they exhibit.

Another major problem occurs when critiques of pornography do not distinguish between the realm of fiction, fantasy, and imagination, on the one hand, and the fact of representation, on the other. In this, the feminist critique tends to echo the right wing in the opposition to porn — that showing sexuality is itself the problem. While anti-porn feminists may allow for some sexually explicit material, their analysis is often strongly normative. Politically correct sexuality can be shown, but certain behaviors and minority tastes are definitely beyond the



acceptable. Robin Morgan has gone so far as to argue that not only can women change their basic fantasy structures by an act of will, but that they are obligated to do so to remain feminists: if fantasies are reactionary, change them. While it may well be that some women (and men) can and do change their basic sexual fantasies, it has yet to be shown how the vast majority of people can do so.

The deep power of much art, from fictional narration to visual representation, in print and in performance and on the screen, lies precisely in connecting with subconscious patterns of feeling and thinking. People initially form these patterns in infancy and childhood, and however much they later modify and transform their personality, most subconscious patterns are not completely transcended. Thus people commonly find pleasure in what they themselves may regard as politically incorrect fantasies. But this is part of the nature of fantasy and the artistic use of it. Fantasy is precisely what people desire but do not necessarily want to act on. It is an imaginative substitution and not necessarily a model for overt behavior. Morgan's famous slogan, "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice," assumes a cause and effect relation which is speculative at best. Yes, some rapists use pornography (which alone doesn't prove cause), but not all men (and certainly not the majority) who use pornography become rapists. The slogan implies a strategy: eliminate pornography and you will eliminate rape. Yet that strategy seems to substitute attacking the symptom for confronting the problem.

The evolution of the feminist anti-pornography movement has been to seek state censorship. Earlier protests used direct action, such as vandalizing objectionable billboards, informational leafleting, and picketing specific films. As women have turned to a strategy of pressuring for local censorship ordinances, they have been willing in some cases to form alliances with the right, such as the Moral Majority in Indianapolis. In doing so, the feminist anti-porn movement seems to have lost an understanding of how and why censorship has been used by the right, and also by the capitalist state. It seems increasingly to support a very narrow view of acceptable sexuality and acceptable representations of sexuality in imaginative forms. And it seems deeply confused about the actual history of sexual representation and censorship.

In the post-WW2 era, the struggle over censorship, especially in the areas of information on sexuality and of taboo-breaking art, came out of a long history of progressives attacking the conservative Puritan legacy of the U.S.'s colonial origins, and to attack censorship meant to struggle against the way the McCarthy era repressed dissent in all forms. Sexual conservatism moved not only against pornography but also against birth control information and against lesbian and gay sexuality. Censorship attacked literature that treated sexual themes, European films which

showed nudity or criticisms of religion, the pivoting hips of Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley, and nudity and profanity in the experimental films of the New American Cinema. In this context, those who fought censorship by invoking civil liberties and freedom of speech opened the very ground on which later movements could flourish.

The currently dominant version of the history of the women's movement stresses the autonomy of feminist organizing and its reaction to male chauvinism in the left, yet this obscures the actual origins of the first women to take up the feminist cause in the 60s. By and large they came to feminism with some experience in the left, the antiwar or student or civil rights movements, or from bohemian and artist culture or the counterculture, and they brought with them the considerable social disrepute of those origins. For example, the earliest feminist demonstrations included protesting the Miss America pageant by burning bras, a piece of guerrilla theater which both criticized conventional standards of beauty and indicated a physical and sensual freedom at the same time. "Bra-burning" was not an adequate symbol for the sexual change that most feminists sought, but in fact sexual change was an important part of the early feminist agenda, particularly as women discussed these issues in consciousness-raising groups. Sexual liberation played a part in the original feminist movement, although not in the same sense as male promoters of sexual freedom thought of it. Kate Millett's critique of the misogynist celebration of male sexuality in Lawrence, Mailer, and Miller was a justified response to men who were not sensitive to what a feminist sexual politics was and could be. Yet Millett also included a chapter on Jean G  net as a writer who imaginatively explored power relations in sexuality, particularly homosexuality. Later developments in the women's movement seemed to drop these early tendencies,

As consciousness-raising groups declined as a central component of the movement, women stopped discussing details about their own sexuality especially when their sexual practice did not seem to match the assumed norm. The growth of a "respectable" reform movement within feminism as embodied in the National Organization of Women and *Ms.* magazine played down marginal and rebellious elements. And the growth of a straight-lesbian split in the early 70s further dampened the open discussion of sexuality among women across heterosexual-lesbian lines. The result was a kind of assumed (and reduced) norm of sexuality, which had the effect of hushing up women whose actual practice differed. This is the context in which the feminist anti-porn movement began to encounter vocal feminist opposition.

A feminist art magazine, *Heresies*, published a "Sex Issue" that contained a good amount of provocative, "politically incorrect" material. The Barnard Conference was held, with attendant controversy. It gave a forum to feminist thinkers who had misgivings about the notions of

"politically correct" sexuality put forth by the feminist anti-porn movement. In a front-page *Village Voice* review of NOT A LOVE STORY, Ruby Rich turned a skeptical eye on the film's anti-porn movement spokeswomen and its quasi-religious-conversion style of argumentation. And two anthologies of feminist writings reconsidering the whole question of sexuality appeared: *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, and *Pleasure and Danger: Explorations in Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole Vance. Most controversially, within the lesbian-feminist movement, some women came out and declared their involvement in sadomasochist sexuality and defended it as compatible with their feminist beliefs.

What this counter-development underlines is the uncertain future of feminist discussions of sexuality. What feminism has accomplished has been first of all an understanding of rape culture, of how power and sexual violence are used to control women. And it is also clear that old appeals to the "liberating" nature of sexual images or arguments against censorship that invoke civil liberties without addressing the fact of women's subjugation have no credibility among feminists. Any analysis of sexual representation must start from an understanding of male power and privilege. But it is also clear that feminism has not developed a generally accepted theory of sexuality. The division within the women's movement on this question indicates the need for further discussion, further analysis, and respectful opening up of the discussion to include everyone with a stake in the issues of sexuality and sexual representation.

In the face of an ongoing and often bitterly antagonistic division within the women's movement on questions of pornography, sexual images and sexuality, we think a few basic principles are necessary on which to build a more fully developed analysis.

1. First of all, sexuality must be understood as a social construction. That is, sexuality is not a natural, simple, totally biological, and universal phenomenon. Indeed, when people talk about what is natural or normal, then they misrecognize that there is a social context of oppression and a real power differential between different social groups. And then people misrecognize or ignore the cultural dimensions of that practice they would speak of as natural; e.g., it's natural for women to have babies. We need to understand sexuality as changing and changeable and fundamentally complex, for individuals and in society. It is profoundly social and historical in nature and formed within the interaction of body and mind, thoughts and feelings, unconscious and consciousness.

2. Second, sexuality must be understood with a full appreciation of the social diversity of and variations in sexual expression and behavior. Human social-sexual activity is extremely diverse across cultures and throughout history. This diversity must be accepted before we can begin

to adequately discuss or theorize about sexuality. We need to know how sexuality is shaped within social relations and in turn shapes them. This means accepting diversity and variation as social facts. It means seeing sexual expression as a spectrum of different activities, not as a rigidly demarcated set of normal and abnormal behaviors.

3. Sexuality must be understood with a concept of contradiction, of how in its individual human development and in its general social appearance, sexuality is not a fixed and specific thing but a process with conflict and differentiation. We need (but don't presently have) an adequate theory of pleasure. How is desire, the seeking of pleasure, formed in human physical and mental development and shaped in ongoing expression and experience? The psychoanalytic theory of fantasy offers some clues but is very weak. We need to understand to what extent sexuality is shaped by infantile hostility, anger, frustration, and aggression when a child cannot have the warmth, touching, and food it craves, This earliest scenario of desire and pleasure and their deflection, and the extraordinarily long dependence of human children on adults, indicates that basic psychic patterns are established within power relations and these patterns continue into adult life.

4. Further discussion calls for a fuller understanding of the social and political nature of censorship in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere. The feminist critique of the liberal ideology of "sexual liberation" has advanced discussion to a different place, but in the process it has often dismissed lessons that can be learned from history. A substantial portion of 19th century feminism took up the cause of moral reform and became extremely conservative; there are signs that the same thing is happening today with feminist anti-pornography advocates. We must also consider the actual social and political impact of censorship struggles — who benefits from them and who suffers. The right and the bourgeois status quo have a long history of using censorship against progressive forces and sexual minorities, particularly gay men and lesbians. To give local police, prosecutors, and community pressure groups a new power to censor and to assume they will only use it against blatantly violent and sexist pornography and not against feminist, left, and gay bookstores is to display a remarkable ignorance of history and a naiveté about how laws are actually used, The fundamentalist right has been particularly active in the Reagan era in rural and small town America in censoring of school and library books; new censorship laws give them more power. The state and its legal system are not neutral entities which feminists can simply use to their own ends. The shift in the anti-pornography movement from direct action, educational, and pressure tactics to seeking a legislative solution is a regressive move.

5. We have to understand the kind of knowledge that is gained in practice and experience about regarding sexuality and sexual representation. Much of the anti-pornography literature has been

generated by people who seem ignorant of the actual work of women artists who dealt profoundly with issues of sexuality and with how to represent it in their work. Visual, performance, and media arts have many feminist artists who have thought a great deal about sexual representation, and in many cases challenge orthodoxy. These women's experience and ideas should form part of the ongoing discussion. Similarly, women who have worked in and are working in the sex industries have a kind and quality of information and analysis that needs to be incorporated into the discussion of sexuality and sexual representation. One fundamental premise of the early feminist movement was that all women had something to contribute to feminism. The respectable-reformist wing of the women's movement has moved away from that position and will only listen to prostitutes, models, and sex performers if the latter seem sufficiently repentant and enlightened. But the women who have the most experience with and the closest perception of the sexual-industrial system must be included in the discussion.

6. We need to find ways of carrying on a discussion of pornography and sexual images that allow for a wide range of and differences in sexual experience and practices. For example, many women have had varying exposure to pornography, and thus different kinds of familiarity with the issues. Much of the support for the feminist anti-porn position seems to come from women who do not have a very wide range of sexual experience or exposure to pornography and who are shocked by images in a slide show or pornographic clips in NOT A LOVE STORY. The organizing problem is both to validate these women's anger at abusive sexual images, and yet to understand that shock at what is unfamiliar may not be sufficient for developing an adequate understanding of sexuality and representations of it. It is common in the training of physicians and social workers to show them filmed examples of variant sexual activities so they are not shocked when patients and clients discuss their sexual practices. A similar kind of desensitizing is needed to carry on discussion of sexual representation. Sadly, the slide shows and NOT A LOVE STORY often take worst-case examples to represent various sexual activities and deny the care and love that can be expressed through sexual minority practices.

7. We need to understand the actual use of sexual images in people's lives. Given the prevailing lack of information, analysts keep falling back on simplistic assumptions about pornography and other material. How and why do women use pornography, alone or in couple relations? Cable programmers report that most single women choose the "adult entertainment" (soft core porn) option in a cable package. Here is a market larger than the circulation of *Playboy* or *Hustler*. What does it mean that these women are choosing to have porn in their homes? Basically no one knows, but the mere fact of the phenomenon seems to challenge conventional notions about women's "natural" disinterest in

porn,

8. We need to understand the situation in which we find ourselves in a dynamic way. Feminism has carried the discussion of sexuality and sexual representation further than it has gone before. The paradigm of discussion as it developed in the 50s and 60s is inadequate to a contemporary understanding of the issues. But we still need to understand human sexuality and how sexual representation functions more adequately before truly radical strategies can be proposed and acted on. In advanced capitalist societies, sexuality remains a site of contention, a locus of the intersecting demands of personal experience and merchandising and commodification, a place where private and public intersect. This explains the importance of sexual representation, but it doesn't automatically indicate how and why sexual representation functions and how it can be changed in a progressive direction. Answering those questions remains a task before us.

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